

4-H Youth Development specialist Diane Mack says kids get to know each other more closely on 4-H trips.



Beyond the Borders

4-Her Says District Has Helped Her Form New Friendships

BELLEVILLE, Kan. – In the past two years, 14-year-old Lanessa Aurand said her 4-H trips have helped her make lasting friendships with kids outside her county.

Her 4-H Club – the Republic Pioneers of Belleville -- is part of the River Valley Extension District, which coordinates travel and other activities for clubs in Clay, Cloud, Republic and Washington counties.

“Before we were in a district, I went to 4-H camp and I met friends there, but I never made any lasting friendships,” Aurand said. “When we became a district, we started carpooling to state events. I’ve always known ‘Jesse’, but since we’ve been in a district, we’ve become really good friends.

“We both found out that we really enjoy cross country and track and we just get along great. She is probably one of my best friends. Every time I see her, we talk and hug and catch up, and I probably wouldn’t have formed that friendship if we weren’t in a district together because I wouldn’t have gotten the opportunity to know her.”

4-H Youth Development specialist Diane Mack says it’s an added benefit to counties who join districts.

“Bringing young people together in a vehicle and traveling the distance, it is a time when they can visit and get to know one another on a closer basis,” Mack

said. “[And] when they go back home, they have all this wonderful social media to use to stay connected with each other, whether using Facebook or texting.”

Lanessa’s mom, Gina, an agent in the River Valley Extension District, said she appreciates the social opportunities the district has given her daughter.

“Southern Cloud and Republic County were at the same track meet recently, so Jesse will hunt Lanessa down and they will visit, and as Lanessa was running her mile, Jesse would be on the side of the track cheering for her,” Gina Aurand said.

“I know that they have made different contacts with each other, and I know for sure that is an experience that I really would not have seen happening if we had not moved to an extension district.”

Information from 4-H Youth Development indicates that the state’s programs have thrived with the beginning of extension districts in 1993, including:

- district-wide training sessions in the Meadowlark Extension District for community leaders, clubs and council officers;

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- district-wide festivals and ag days in the Walnut Creek Extension District;
- district-wide 4-H Day, rotating between counties in the River Valley Extension District;
- more disciplines available in shooting sports and the opportunity to form district teams for the Rolling Prairie and Golden Prairie extension districts;
- a district-wide junior leader group in the Post Rock Extension District; and
- a district-wide media team to provide training in radio and video for kids in the Central Kansas Extension District.

“We know that 4-H produces great leaders, so one of the things that happens within a district, too, is that there’s more leadership opportunities,” Mack said. “Youth are able to come together, work together as a team, develop those leadership skills, whether it’s successes – and maybe a failure or two – that they can



River Valley Extension District agent Gina Aurand said she appreciates social opportunities that 4-H offers youth.

come together, learn from those mistakes and build those leadership skills.”

And, of course, meet others, too.

“The two-hour car rides where you fall asleep on each other’s shoulders...I’ve also met a lot of friends from Washington County through 4-H and every year we request to be in the same cabin for camp,” Lanessa Aurand said. “I mean, it’s just a lot of fun to get to know these girls.”